

# BLAKE's REMARKS

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o n

Com. JOHNSTONE's ACCOUNT

OF HIS

E N G A G E M E N T

WITH A

205

FRENCH SQUADRON,

UNDER THE COMMAND OF

Mons. D E S U F F R E I N,

o n

A P R I L 16, 1781,

I N

PORT PRAYA ROAD, IN THE ISLAND OF St. JAGO.

A NEW EDITION.

To this EDITION is prefixed a LETTER from BLAKE to the COMMODORE, and a PLAN of the HARBOUR, &c.

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L O N D O N.

Printed for J. DEBRETT, (Successor to Mr. ALMON) opposite  
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M DCC LXXXII.



## To Commodore ~~J~~<sup>—</sup>e.

S I R,

THE Printer informs me, that the encreasing demands of the public make him wish to give a new edition of the Letters of *Blake*. In consenting to his request, I have thought it necessary to premise a few observations, which, while the event of your expedition was in suspence, it might not have been fair or candid to have urged against you.

These observations I take the liberty to address to yourself for two reasons. It is a justice I owe to my own feelings, to explain to you the motives that first induced me to publish my strictures upon your conduct: it is a justice due to you, to give you an opportunity of defending your naval character against an attack made upon it in your absence.

I can assure you, with the strictest truth, that I bear you no *personal enmity*. An unjust, and, as I thought, in your manner of conducting it, an illiberal attack on the character of one of the most distinguished officers this country every produced, first pointed you out to me, as a proper subject for public animadversion. Personal regards to that distinguished officer could not possibly claim any part in that determination. His character stood upon too solid a foundation to require any defence, much less *my* defence, against such an attack. But it was the interest of a faction, under whose banners you then wished to enroll yourself for the first time, to countenance your rash and virulent censures on his conduct; and the authoritative sanction given by them to the doctrines you broached

for this purpose, have been felt, and will long be felt, among the most fatal of their attempts to break the spirit, and subvert the discipline of the British navy.

Your situation in the Road of Port Praya, and when you pursued Mons. De Suffrein to sea, gave this country what I thought a providential opportunity of detecting the danger and fallacy of the new system you endeavoured to introduce into the naval tactic. Yet, however anxious every well wisher to the service must have been to profit by that opportunity, I should certainly have deferred it till your return, if I had not been compelled to take immediate notice of your letter, by the scurrilous, unremitting endeavours of the Admiralty to exalt your naval character, at the hazard of the public safety, and to establish your fame at the expence, as well of the great officer I have already alluded to; as of another, equally revered and distinguished, whom by your friendly strictures, and tender sympathetic feelings expressed in the *House of Commons*, you thought proper to offer up as a second victim to your new patrons.

In the following letters, written from these motives, you will find the manner as well as the matter of your public dispatches animadverted upon with freedom, perhaps with some warmth. This too, was done in justice to the public. Vanity, when it confines it's self-approbation and boastful assumptions to private objects, is a pardonable foible.—To expose it is the poor gratification of personal malice, unworthy of a liberal mind. But when it dares to swell itself into an offence against the state, to impose upon a generous nation in matters that affect her dearest interests, and that are essential to her existence, it calls upon every citizen to expose it's fallacy, to check it's presumption, and guard against it's effects. In doing this, I feel I have no apology to make.

The observations I have to premise are but few. They relate to the reasons you have assigned in your public

public letter for returning to Port Praya instead of pursuing and bringing the enemy to action. The public are very much at a loss to know, how an engagement with Mons. De Suffrein, *in the certainty of success*, would have relinquished the object of your expedition. The immediate object of your expedition, it appears, was the Cape of Good Hope. It failed because the ships and troops under Mons. De Suffrein had arrived and strengthened the Dutch forces there some considerable time before your appearance off Saldahana Bay. It appears from your letter, that you knew the place of the enemy's destination; it also appears that you knew that his arriving there before you would be fatal to the object of your expedition: Why then did you relinquish the immediate prospect of defeating him before he could reach that destination? Or by what train of reasoning could you have concluded that such a defeat would have been to relinquish the object of your expedition, to which you knew the enemy's arrival at the Cape would be fatal.

If his arrival must have proved fatal, what other object should you have had in view but to prevent that arrival? Why rely upon a probable superiority, which *the chance of their sending two of their disabled ships to the West Indies* might give you, when you *actually possessed* a superiority fully adequate to your following up the victory you had gained? Why content yourself with the advantage you had already secured by that victory in *the possibility of their being obliged to touch at the Brazils for water and repairs*, when by pursuing them till morning, and bringing them to action, you would have entirely defeated all their designs and expectations.

The night, you say, *was approaching, the sea had increased*. But the increasing swell of the sea, in the comparative state of the two fleets, must have been of singular advantage to the squadron under your command. The night was short. The moon, then just past the full, rose at half past two; you out-sailed the

enemy, as it appears from your letter; you must, therefore, have soon come up with them, and with the moon-light, at that season in those latitudes, such small squadrons could be easily kept in view.

Your objection of being brought too much to lee-ward must be puerile, if from no other reasons, at least from your certain prospect of success; for, as I have already observed, success would have obviated an event, which has caused your expedition, as far as the public interest is concerned, to fail of it's object.

Your apprehensions about your convoy, appear, also, to be groundless and nugatory. Will you pretend to assert in the face of the service that it was not in *the resources* of an experienced and active officer, to send, what you could well have spared, an armed ship at least, to escort them to a proper place of rendezvous? What force would have been left in those seas, after the defeat of Mons De Suffrein, from which with such an escort, and their own armed force, they could have any interruption to dread?

Will you assert in the face of the service, that *an experienced and active officer could have found no no other expedient but that of returning to Port Praya with his whole fleet, to prevent his convoy being left in distress?* Was this the only way he could have devised to guard against *his being separated from the troops, or to adopt any fixed determination concerning them or their destination?* Could your own *mature deliberations, or the advice of those officers, on whose judgment you chiefly relied,* point out no other method of accomplishing even the immediate object of your expedition, the gaining the Cape of Good Hope, but that which left the enemy at liberty to get there before you, which *you knew would prove fatal?* These are questions which justice at least to those officers, requires you should answer to their country, and to the service to which they belong.

There is yet a part of your conduct, though not connected with the subject of those letters, on which,

as one of the public, I have a right to question you. By whose directions, or in consequence of what previous instructions, or actual information received at the time of the state of this country, or of any stake or interest it might have in the Port of Lisbon, did you take upon you to quit your convoy and sail for that port? The public, at present, know but one object which you could have had in view; and firm and founded, indeed, must your reliance have been on the negligence and pusillanimity of Administration, and of their fears to offend you, if you presumed for such an object, to expose one of his Majesty's ships, and withdraw her from the public service? Are you wronged by these suspicions? Tell us so, and we shall be satisfied,

BLAKE

## REMARKS, &c.

### LETTER I.

IF the scurrilous paragraphs against Lord Howe and Admiral Keppel, with which the ministerial prints have teemed since the publication of *Governor Johnstone's extraordinary letter*, went only to gratify the rancour and envy of those who pay such writers out of the public purse, the best way of treating them would be, to pass them over in silence and contempt. Were I at all to take notice of them in that light, the file addressing itself to the viper in the fable, would suggest to me a short, but compleat answer: But when, in addition to these base motives, we find, that they are designed

signed to deceive the nation on a most important point, and to transfer that popularity, which should be the *exclusive*, as it is *the best reward* of long-tried merit, and successful services, to ignorance, rashness, and vain-boasting, it is a duty we owe our country to counteract their designs, and expose their fallacy.

The Governor, it is well known, owes his command to his political apostacy. This, like charity, hath covered the *infinite multitude* of his past sins and transgressions. Conceiving himself slighted by Lord Howe, who did not chuse to employ him in *hostile* operations, at a time when he was *acting the part* of a Commissioner for *peace* in America, and to the exclusion of his own officers, his hot and fiery spirit seized the very first opportunity of gratifying his revenge. From his seat in Parliament he openly condemned the conduct of that favourite Admiral, when opposed to Monsieur d'Eftaign; and held himself up to the laughter and ridicule of every officer in the navy, by endeavouring to prove, that the British force on that occasion was superior to the enemy.

I will venture to assert, that Governor Johnstone was the *only* man in the three kingdoms, who could have commanded sufficient *power of face* publicly to attack Lord Howe for ignorance in his profession. But that gentleman, it seems, hides his face only for the transgression of his friends;\* for himself he has no blushes!

The service, however, which he thus rendered to Administration, entitled him to their favour and protection, even beyond all his efforts as Commissioner, or his zealous and virtuous attempts to corrupt the Congress. Though he had never commanded a post ship in his life, he was the very next morning complimented with a distinguishing pendant; and the murmurs and complaints that have since been raised, by his continuing to be employed on separate commands,

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\* This alludes to a reflection of his on Mr. Keppel's conduct on the 27th of July.

in prejudice to so many old and experienced Officers, have been heard even among the members of the Admiralty Board.\*

Thus favoured, and with *such* merit to recommend him, can we be surprized that he alone, of all our Commanders, should be defended by the united powers of Administration? That he should be ranked with the Hawkes and the Boscowens? And that his actions should be blazoned, and hung out to admiration; while others, who have not the *same* merit to boast, are not only given up as sacrifices to the venal pens of paragraph writers, but are even authoritatively stigmatized in the avowed publications of Government? But the nation shall not be deceived, in order to answer the purposes of a faction; nor shall a conduct be held up for the praises and gratitude of the public, that deserves the strongest censure. When the people are ill-served, they shall not be insulted and misled by those who serve them ill, however it may forward the views, or gratify the low passions of their employers to support them; nor shall they be the dupes of a self-praised boaster, who will have them rejoice for a victory, merely because he is pleased, in the puerile effusions of his wild imagination, to tell them he has gained one.

But I beg pardon; invective and abuse shall be left to the Governor's advocates. The ground I mean to take, shall be established in facts.—In examining his conduct, I shall not hazard a single assertion that is not supported by record, nor advert to a single circumstance in the affair in Port Praya Road, that cannot be proved from his own public letter. His greatest enemy, indeed, in all the *inventive* malice of private revenge,

\* It is generally believed, that the disgraceful attempt upon Flushing was undertaken merely to appease a certain Lord of the Admiralty, who took disgust at this preference given to the Governor. It was requisite, at all events, that his Lordship also should have a separate command.

revenge, could not suggest a combination of circumstances so calculated to condemn him, even *on his own principles*, as that letter contains. This I pledge myself to prove to the public.

## LETTER II.

THE principle on which Governor Johnstone founds his new system of Naval Tactics, and on which his advocates build all his fame, is, that the force of adverse fleets is not to be estimated by the rate of the several ships, as opposed to each other in the line; or the comparative weight of metal; but from the whole number of guns in the respective squadrons taken together, and directed from every point. In applying this doctrine to the situation of Lord Howe, he pieced out the British line with fifty gun ships and frigates; and the comparison of the force of the two squadrons, he calculated in the following manner:

The Cornwall of - - -	74	a match for the Cæsar of 74
The Eagle of - - -	64	for the Languedoc of and the Experiment of 50
The Trident of - - -	64	for the Tonnant of and Rœbuck of 44
The Raisonnable of - - -	64	for the Guerrier of and Phœnix of 44
The Somerset of - - -	70	for the Hector of 74
The Nonsuch of - - -	64	for the Protecteur of and Richmond of 32
The St. Albans of - - -	64	for the Zelée of 74
and Venus of - - -	36	
The Ardent of - - -	64	for the Marseilles of and Pearl of 32
	74	The

The Preston of - - -	50 }	for the Valiant of 64
and Apollo of - - -	32 }	
The Isis of - - -	50 }	for the Provence of
and Vigilant of - - -	20 }	64
The Centurion of - - -	50 }	for the Fantasque of
and Sphynx of - - -	20 }	64
The Renown of - - -	50	for the Sagittaire of 50

Having thus far established the *equality* of the two squadrons, he proceeded to prove the *superiority* on our side. With this view he observed, that Lord Howe, besides this force, had the Nautilus sloop of 18 guns, Carcass and Thunder bombs, Strombolo, Sulphur, and Volcano fire-ships, four row gallies, and two tenders.

Let us now adopt the same mode of calculation, and apply it to his own situation.

The Hero of - - -	74 }	a match for the Heros of 74
The Monmouth of - - -	64 }	a match for the Ar- tesien of 64
The Romney of - - -	50 }	for the Annibal of
and Diana of - - -	36 }	74
The Jupiter of - - -	50 }	for the Sphynx of
and Active of - - -	32 }	64
The Isis of - - -	50 }	for the Vengeur of
and Manilla of - - -	20 }	64
The Oporto of - - -	16 }	for the Fortune of
		16

So far the two squadrons, according to the Governor's principles, were *equal*. But what will his advocates say, when we add the immense *superiority* which the remaining part of his squadron must have given him? For he had *besides*, the Jason of 32 guns, the St. Carlos of 28, the Royal Charlotte of 24, the Porpoise of 24, the Pondicherry of 24, the Resolution of 20, the Lord Townshend of 20, the Terror bomb of

10, the Infernal fireship of 8 ; thirteen East Indiamen, at 26 guns each, and twelve transports, -armed at least with six guns a transport. These last can surely be taken into the collected force-with much more justice than Lord Howe's row gallies, with a single gun in their prow ; and for the tender, with which his Lordship is charged on account, we find one on the Governor's list also.

Thus we see, that, deducting the ships with which he should have matched the enemy's whole squadron, the Governor had a spare force of no less than 600 guns ; that is 244 guns more than the whole strength he had to contend with.

With this spare force alone, even if he had no other, he stood pledged to his country, by his own doctrines and declarations, to defeat the whole French armament. In his attack upon Lord Howe, he declared it to have been his opinion, that “ even before his Lordship had been joined by the Cornwall of 74 guns, the Raisonable of 64, the Renown of 50, and the Centurion of 50, he was fully capable, *with a proper disposition of his force*, of defending the harbour, though not of going out and giving the enemy battle.” [See Governor Johnstone’s own speech in the Parliamentary Register, vol. 12, p. 246.] Yet Lord Howe’s whole force at that time, counting every gun he could bring to bear of whatever weight, or from whatever point, did not surpass the number of the enemy’s weighty guns. Was not the Governor’s situation at St. Jago equally favourable ? Should not then his spare force alone, as it gave him a superiority of 244 guns, have enabled him, *with a proper disposition*, to have defended the harbour ? And if this be true, as, on his own principle, it cannot be controverted, how will he answer to his country for not having, with *his whole force combined*, sunk, taken, or destroyed, the whole squadron that had so madly attacked him.

After this, shall we be told, that the gallant Commodore has realized his system ? How has he realized it ?

According

According to him, Lord Howe, with six sail of 64 gun ships, three of 50, two of 40, with some frigates and sloops, for the most part wretchedly manned, was fully capable of *defending* himself, with a proper disposition, against a 90 gun ship, an 80, six 74, three 64, a 50, and three frigates, mounting 36 guns each! But did the Governor even do so much with a superiority of 600 guns, and so small a comparative disposition even in weight of metal? Certainly not. The British flag was insulted by the capture of a King's ship, and some of his convoy were taken and carried out to sea. The trial, therefore, of that part of his system that regards the defence of the harbour, condemns him. What other part of it he realized, the nation is yet to learn. Did he engage the enemy in a line, or in the open seas? Did he support his fifties with his frigates, and try their united strength with the heavy ships of the enemy? He might, indeed, have done it. In the situation the French squadron put to sea, he might, on every system, have done it with a certainty of victory. But he shrunk from the trial, and by that means *lost a glorious opportunity of destroying the fleet of France.*

Thus far I have considered what it was fair to expect the Governor *ought to have done*, according to his own principles. In my next, I shall examine what he tells us in his public letter, *he has done.*

## LETTER III:

**T**HE first thing I shall notice in Governor Johnstone's letter, is his unworthy attempt to impress the public with an idea of the great inferiority of his force, and thereby prepare them to receive the

subsequent account of his victory with the greater admiration and applause. Three capital frigates are totally passed over in silence. The East Indiamen, which, from the situation in which he chose to leave them, bore the chief brunt of the action, and from their number of guns, their weight of metal, and the spirit displayed by their officers and men, might, *if properly disposed*, have formed a most formidable force, are mentioned, seemingly as making part of his encumbrance among the transports and victuallers under his protection. The number of his armed ships, furnished with a tier of guns each, and commanded by King's officers, can only be learned from his narrative of the operations of the day, in which they appear to have borne as great a part as their situation would permit.

Such meretricious arts justify us in our representation of that species of merit that first recommended the American Commissioner to the notice of the First Lord of the Admiralty.

At half past nine, he tells the Secretary of State, he perceived the signal for seeing eleven strange ships in the Offing. He immediately repaired on board the Romney; he *then* made the signal for all persons to come from shore, and to repair on board their respective ships; he *then* enforced this signal by repeated firing of guns; he *then* dispatched a boat on shore, to give more expedition and effect to the embarkation; at length he made the signal to unmoor, and another to prepare for battle.

In the whole of his narrative, except upon one occasion, the Governor cautiously avoids mentioning any time from half past nine in the morning till sun-set. Perhaps he might have forgot this essential information, in the hurry of the fortnight which he took to write and *polish* his dispatches. However, as he has not given it, we cannot precisely determine the moments that were lost between the first signal's being made from the Isis, and the signal to unmoor and pre-  
pare

pare for battle. From the face of his own account, however, a very considerable time must have intervened; yet I will appeal to every officer of experience, if the first signal he would have made, would not have been the signal to unmoor and prepare for battle? If he would not have made it without the loss of one instant, as soon as ever it was known that a strange fleet was in sight, and had power to fetch into the road? But I beg pardon. As the Governor is to be judged by his own system, his advocates may object to all appeals to experience.

The only hour of the day which the Governor chuses to instance, is the quarter before eleven. At that time he tells us the enemy appeared coming round the east point of the island, drawn up in a line, and leading into the Bay. It must have been at least half an hour more before the attack begun; yet, in all this time, from half after nine till near half after eleven, it does not appear that the Governor took a single step, either to draw his ships out of the confusion in which he suffered them to anchor, or to have directed any one necessary preparative for receiving the enemy.

We are told indeed, that Capt. Pasley had worked hard from the beginning of the busines to get a spring upon his cable, by which every shot told from the Jupiter. Capt. Pasley, I dare say, merited this honourable testimony. But why did not the Governor take care that all the other ships had employed their time as usefully? Had he no signal for the fleet to get springs on their cables? Could he not have given verbal orders for the purpose, as he rowed through the fleet, exhorting them to prepare for battle? It would have been at furthest the busines of half an hour, and was a necessary precaution that would have instantly occurred to an officer of the least knowledge of his profession. Had it been taken, every ship in the fleet would have placed her fire to as much effect as the Jupiter.

But

But instead of this or any other necessary order, it appears that every officer was left to himself—all the preparations to receive the enemy, if they should offer any insult, were confined to the clearing ship—the bands were indeed active, but the head was confused, bewildered, *without resource*.

This the Governor himself tells the Secretary of State in precise words. He modestly allows, that the action bordered on a surprise; we were liable to much confusion, “yet upon the whole, he saw nothing in the British fleet, but steady, cool, determined valour.” I believe him implicitly; and have only to regret with my country, that valour so steady, so cool, and so determined, in such a scene of surprize, confusion and disorder, should have been partly sacrificed, and upon the whole, frustrated by the ignorance of the man who was to direct it.

But suppose I was to ask the Governor’s friends, why he suffered the action even to border on a surprise? An officer so great in theory, must have known even from his books, that one of the first rules prescribed to a Commander in Chief, is always to suppose himself liable to surprize, and to guard against it. But the Governor had more positive incitements than general rules. He knew, before he left Europe, that the enemy had a considerable force in readiness to follow him. The Commanding Officer, whom he sent with a detachment of his squadron to water at the Isle of May, received the most pressing orders to join the flag in Port Praya Road, by a given time; and so great was that officer’s anxiety to execute those orders, “from an apprehension of the enemy’s appearing before his return,” that he arrived at St. Jago nine hours within the time allowed him. It is therefore evident, that the apprehensions of an enemy being in those seas prevailed through the fleet.

Under such circumstances, an Officer of the least foresight or knowledge of his duty, would have taken every precaution that vigilance or skill in his profession could

could have dictated. He would have suffered no officers or men to be on shore, but such as were absolutely necessary for watering and victualling; and the courtly phrase of such numbers *enjoying the recreation of the shore*, would have never disgraced his public letters, as an excuse for his neglect.

To these precautions, he would have added all the advantage of situation. He would have skilfully improved, in the security of a friend's port, the various circumstances of position, as the soundings and anchorage might be adapted to the ships of different size and force. The soundings in Port Praya Road, deepen regularly from three fathom and a half to twelve. He consequently could have anchored his victuallers and other unarmed incumbrance in the shoalest water, and disposed his men of war and other armed force, as might best secure them from the attempts of an enemy: He would have placed his strongest ships where they should be most likely to receive the chief attack, and would have so stationed the others, as to concentrate their fire, and point it to the best effect against ships labouring under every disadvantage of attacking so formidable a force, anchored under the lee of an island, with all it's guns brought to bear, whilst they should be obliged to lead in one after another, ship by ship, exposed to a tremendous fire without being able to return it, till they had brought to anchor and furled their sails. How unequal the enemy was to this difficult manœuvre we learn from the Governor's own account. Indeed it requires the aid of a discipline seldom found except in some distinguished ships of the British navy. We still remember with admiration an instance of this discipline executed with all the coolness of intrepidity and display of professional knowledge, when the noble Lord, whom the victor of Port Praya dared to arraign for ignorance in his profession, commanded the Magnanime off the Isle of Aix.

By such skilful improvements of place and situation, and by the admirable position of his ships, it was that  
Admiral

Admiral Barrington defended the Bay of St. Lucia against treble his force. By these he at once secured the conquest of the island, and deterred Monsieur D'Estaing from venturing an attack. But Governor Johnstone despairs to take instruction from any man's knowledge or experience. He has a system of his own, and upon that system no doubt he formed his disposition.

Instead of being in the least prepared against a surprise, he suffers 1500 persons belonging to his fleet to be on shore at once, besides officers and troops, *taking the recreation of the shore.* He keeps no small vessels cruizing in the offing, on the look-out, to give the earliest intelligence of the appearance of any strange ships. His friends will not pretend that he was lulled into this dangerous security by the protection of the Portuguese flag, under which he was anchored. He asserts the contrary himself; "he well knew the small regard which the French usually pay to the laws of nations, when they are possessed of a superior force, or find it convenient to dispense with such obligations."

The disposition of his force was as injudicious as his security was culpable. His men of war, his East Indiamen, his transports and victuallers, were all anchored promiscuously, without order or method. His fireship, instead of being ordered to prime, and placed near the flag for service, was suffered to lie out entirely separated from the rest of the fleet; and we find her with the bomb and East Indiamen, exposed to the first vigorous and undamped attack of the enemy. He tells us indeed, that the bomb and fireship continued for two days to disobey his written orders, by anchoring without the rest of the ships. But his excuse is his crime. To what purpose issue orders, if care is not taken to see them obeyed? And what are we to think of this Commander-in-Chief, who suffers so flagrant an act of disobedience to brave him for two days together in the eyes of the whole fleet?

The

The Romney, one of his ships of greatest force, on board of which his own flag was hoisted, and to which the whole squadron was to have looked for example as well as directions, lay so far within the East Indiamen and transports, that she could only fire in two openings, and this, as the Governor quaintly expresses it, with a precision which was cautiously observed. Nay, she was so entangled among the ships, that she could not even veer away cable to open a larger space; yet, during the whole course of the morning, no order was given to make her change her birth, neither as the enemy was approaching, nor when she became of no use in the action.

The Governor, having at length discovered that she was become useless to the fleet, repairs on board the Hero. For what purpose? To direct the operations of the squadron? No, this could have never been in his thoughts. He never hoisted his broad pendant on board her; that remained flying on board the Romney, equally useless with her guns, and the fleet in vain looked to her for direction, as they had all along looked to her for support, in vain. The only reason we can gather from his letter, for thus changing his ship, was, that he might enjoy that cheerful and affable civility with which Captain Hawker received him. It was to see the awful discharge of so formidable a train of artillery, managed with all the ease and sociability of a convivial dinner at the British; or to feel in a peculiar degree, the satisfaction of being near General Meadows, which he knew would rise in proportion to the heat and danger of the action, and the slaughter from the guns. But why he gave up all attention to every other part of his squadron, or why he did not profit of the business of that period to order the Romney to shift her birth, to take a more open station, or become of some use to the general business of the day, his advocates no doubt will resolve into his new system.

## LETTER IV.

**I**N such a scene of confusion, disorder, and uncertainty, as Governor Johnstone's own account states his fleet to have been surprized in; when a great part of the damage our ships sustained must have been caused by their firing into each other; when to avoid increasing those damages some of our heaviest guns were compelled to be silent; when no one could either give support to his neighbour, or hope to receive it, and nothing was left to the officers or men but to counteract, by personal exertions, the ignorance and neglect that had betrayed them into so helpless a situation; it cannot excite our surprise that a mad and ill-conducted attack from *two sail of the line* should be merely repulsed; or that the British squadron should, at the moment, think themselves fortunate in escaping with the loss of a King's ship, and the capture of the East India-men. But what must excite at once our surprise and indignation is, the folly and extravagance of the man who, from such circumstances, can arrogate to himself the honour of a victory; and the absurdity of the Minister, who, in the face of the nation, can countenance him in this ridiculous assumption.

That the Governor was *seriously* attacked by only *two sail of the line*, is evident from his letter. For how does he describe the conduct of the enemy.

The French Commodore, after passing the Diana, Terror bomb, and Infernal fireship, dropt his anchor within two cables length of the Monmouth, Jupiter, and Hero, and began to fire away among the ships as fast as he could discharge and load. To what little purpose he could either load or discharge appears, however, from the small damages of those ships on the returns, and the confusion in which the Governor represents him, with his sails flying about.

The

The next French ship which followed the Commodore anchored a-head of him. This was the Annibal. She appears to have done her duty.

The third ship endeavoured to pass through for the Romney. But the Romney, it seems, received from the East Indiamen and transports that protection which she was meant to have given them. She was too closely surrounded by the ships that lay *without her*. The Frenchman could not weather them; he therefore anchored a-stern of his Commodore, and continued there for a short space, driving about with his sails loose, until he boarded the Fortitude and Hinchinbrook East Indiamen. To this was confined the whole of his attack; for the Governor tells us, he then went to sea, and deserted his Commander.

In describing the motions of the fourth ship, the Governor conveys a strong idea of the difficulties which the enemy must have had to struggle against in making their approach, and of the great advantage which a force like our's, if properly disposed, must have had over them. He points her out as running on different lines, luffing and bearing up as she passed among the skirt of our ships, firing in great confusion, and at length with much difficulty wearing clear of the reef on the West point without us. Here she quits the scene of action, and we hear no more of her.

The fifth never attempted our men of war. She ran among the merchant vessels, firing at all, and endeavouring to board two or three as she passed along, but without success.

From this account it is obvious, that only two of the enemy's ships seriously attacked the whole force under the Governor's command. Whether Monsieur Suffrein was betrayed by his officers, or whether the nature of the road and winds did not permit them to second him or obey his orders, we do not learn. But what we do learn is, that over these two ships the gallant English Commodore obtained a victory with a force of nine hundred and ninety-two guns. With this force

we learn, that in three quarters of an hour he made the French Commodore's place too hot for him; and forced him to cut his cable and put to sea, leaving the Annibal an object to be fired at by all the ships in our fleet that could bring their guns to bear on her.

Such a spectacle of distress the Governor never beheld. Her masts were tottering, her yards hanging different ways, her sails flew about in rags, and full of holes. For fifteen minutes together he contemplated her in this situation, contending that she had struck her colours, against those who alledged that they were merely shot away. A rougher seaman would not have scrupled to take advantage of her helpless and abandoned situation. He would have ordered the Monmouth, or the Hero, or the Jupiter, close to whom she had anchored, to slip and take possession of her, if she had struck, or to intercept her when she went round upon her heels with her stern close to the broadside of the Isis, and compelled her to strike if she refused.

When she was suffered to retreat from her anchor, and exhibited, as she was getting out into the bay, an object infinitely more distressing, when first fell her mizen-mast, next went her main-mast, and lastly the fore-mast and OUTER END of the bowsprit tumbled into the water; when in short she remained a mere unmanageable hulk, so entangled with her own wreck as to offer an easy capture to a fifty gun ship, an officer of any resources would have instantly devised some method to cut her off, as she drifted towards the French fleet. They were then beaten and retreating, and even the last of them that went to sea must have been a considerable distance out, as she had been gone from her anchor fifteen minutes before the Annibal. Where was the Jupiter on this tempting occasion? Every thing brilliant was to have been expected from Captain Pasley.—Not only from Captain Pasley—the prospect would have stimulated every officer and man in the fleet to uncommon exertions; and if the French

Commodore

Commodore chose to lay to \* with a view to protect her, it would have been the very measure the Governor should have wished for. Then he might, indeed, *have followed up his victory.* The squadron under his command would have been speedily at sea, offering battle to Monsieur Suffrein, damaged and shattered, as the report of the prisoners proved his own ship to have been; and having so great a part of his strength as a seventy-four converted into weakness, and become an incumbrance, which he should be obliged to protect.

But this was not according to the *Governor's system.* He enjoyed the spectacle of the Annibal's distress, he left her to join the French Commodore as well as she could, and when he saw that she had fairly accomplished this, then, and not till then, he returned to the Romney, and made the signal for all Captains, to consult measures for *following up the victory.*

That at this time he must have thought himself greatly superior to the enemy, will appear from several considerations which I shall lay before the reader. The first is, that the ship in his whole squadron that suffered most in her men, her masts, yards, sails, and rigging, is condemned by him in the severest terms for waiting to repair damages which he considered *as nothing at all.* The rest were in compleat readiness; nor does any thing appear in his letter that insinuates the least obstruction from the *condition* of any other ship except the Isis. It was far different with the enemy. One of their largest ships was a complete wreck, incapable of keeping in the line; and the Heros, from the report of the prisoners, had suffered in proportion. Another is, that in this situation of the enemy, he was more than a match for them, according to his own system, *even without the Isis.* He could have spared her and a frigate of 32 guns, as the French had lost a 74. A third is, that

in

\* Though the Governor makes no mention of it in his letter, it is certain the French Commodore did lay to for the Annibal.

in condemning the conduct of Lord Howe, and proving that he must have thought himself superior in force to Mr. d'Estaing, the Governor mentioned his Lordship's having sent away the Nabob and Supply, two old East Indiamen, that had been converted into store-ships. A measure, he contended, his Lordship would certainly never have pursued, had he not imagined he could well spare *such a force*. Now as the Governor had so many new East Indiamen, and so many armed ships, with a tier of guns each, commanded by King's officers, none of which he took out with him, it is but fair to infer, that he reasoned as he supposed Lord Howe to have reasoned.

This being so, let us now consider how he followed up his victory. The French Commodore must have come to anchor about a quarter after eleven, in three quarters of an hour after he cut his cable, and run through the fleet, and in fifteen minutes after he was followed by the Annibal ; it could not therefore have been one o'clock when the Governor returned to the Romney. Here, then, *was\** a long summer's day before him. Here was a happy opportunity of unteaching *that incredible lesson which France had learned on the 27th of July, that on such a day a French fleet could engage a British fleet, superior in every respect, and yet escape.* This, we shall suppose, was the great and glorious prospect that opened to his mind when he returned to his flag ; but the backwardness and disobedience of one of his officers, blasted all his hopes, and filled him with *such anguish as he never before experienced.*

But in the first place I would ask the Governor, if it was the disobedience of Captain Sutton that made him throw away the great length of time it must have taken to call all his Captains together, to hear the condition of every ship before he ordered them to get to sea. He judged of the condition of the ship that had suffered most by his eye, and he declared that her *damages were nothing at all.* He could have judged in the same manner of the rest ; he must have seen in an instant

\* See his Speech last February in defence of Sir Hugh Palliser.

stant that they had sustained no loss that could be any impediment to their getting under way; and in the length of time here wasted, he must have come up with the shattered squadron of the enemy, before they could have *raised a stump forward*,\* and fixed a sail on it to wear the hulk of the Annibal, or take her in tow.

In the next place, I would ask him, if it was Captain Sutton's disobedience that prevented the Governor from leaving orders for the Romney to change her birth, when he *found out* that she was of no use to the squadron, and went on board the Hero, or for the Jason to be moved out of her way? Had such orders been left, the Romney would have been in a situation to put to sea instantly on the retreat of the enemy, and the acclamations of the fleet would have been better deserved.

Behold her, however, after all these delays, shooting forward in all the pride of *victory*, fresh and vigorous from the *safe birth* where she had lain *secured by her convoy*. The Jupiter instantly followed; but what time the other ships came out, is omitted in the Governor's impatience to stigmatize the failure of the Isis, to which he attributes all his subsequent disappointment.

Now in what does this failure consist? Captain Sutton, seeing his signal enforced by repeated guns, sends a message by the Hero,† that his masts and yards, and  
sails

\* Governor Johnstone, in his petulant observations on the pamphlet of the Narrative of the Conduct of Lord Howe, read to the House of Commons some paragraphs out of that work, written, as he insinuated, in a declamatory and turgid style, and left it to them to judge from such specimens of the language, if the author could be a seaman. Let the Governor's *seamanship* be judged by the same rule.

† By carefully reading this part of the Governor's letter, it will appear, that the Hero could not have gone out many minutes before the Isis; yet no fault is imputed to the Captain of the Hero. Nothing can be more studiously cruel, than the expressions that convey censure on Captain Sutton. It is said, that he at length came out, after *three hours delay*; insinuating, that these three hours

sails and rigging, were so wounded, that he could not come out without repairing them, but that he would follow as soon as he could. His Commander in Chief, by a repetition of his signal, gives him to understand, that he does not think this a sufficient excuse; upon which Capt. Sutton *immediately* comes out.

Where is the crime in this? What more can be expected from an officer, than that, after having made known his situation, he should sacrifice his own private opinion, and not dispute the will of his Commander? Had the Governor of Greenwich Hospital but done as much on the 27th of July, the Navy would have never been insulted, by having the Governor of Pensacola forced back upon the service, which he had so long renounced, and placed in commands of the greatest risque.

At length all the ships being come out, the signal was made to form the line a-head on the larboard tack. The enemy were before the wind, in a line of battle a-breast; *their convoy going off under all the sail they could set*; the rate at which their men of war sailed, we may easily infer from their having in tow a 74 gun ship without masts.

Here again the Governor is stopped by the Isis. Her fore-top-mast went over above the top-sail-yard. *He shortened sail* for her to clear her wreck; this took up forty minutes.

This is another unworthy attempt to mislead. It appears in the following paragraph, that he not only *shortened sail*, but that he *lay to* for these forty minutes. "As soon, says he, as I saw the Isis could make sail, *I bore up, and set the fore-sail*, and made the signal for the line abreast." In his eagerness to fix censure upon Capt. Sutton, he says, "that the fore-top-mast went above the top-sail-yard, which yard was not injured by the

hours were from the time of the Commodore's getting under way, in the Romney, to the sailing of the Isis, than which nothing is more evidently false.

the fall, nor was the sail hurt, or any other damage sustained, to prevent the ship from working, the fore-top-sail being close reefed and set."

Does he not know, that this censure must recoil upon himself? If the Isis received no damage that could prevent her working, where was the necessity of *bringing to* at so critical an hour? Why throw away forty such precious minutes? Every seaman well knows, that the wreck could have been cleared as easily in steering large as in bringing to. Had the fleet done so, and continued under way, the Governor would have found his distance narrowed, and not increased in those unfortunate forty minutes. The great and tempting prospects he mentions, would have presented themselves before sun set; he would have wanted no excuse, no transferring to another the crime of his neglect, in relinquishing the signal advantages which the return of day would have secured to him.

The enemy are represented as retreating before the wind. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should have increased their distance in the forty minutes that our fleet had been laying to. The Governor, however, continues the pursuit; he even gains upon them; when, *at last*, looking behind him, he finds the Isis persevering in her backwardness, and that she and the Monmouth had dropped astern *between two and three miles*.

Let it be remembered, that this was the primitive patriot who would shut his ears to the tenderest calls of nature, when opposed to his duty! who, if he were in command, would sacrifice his own father, or his brother, or his son, his nearest relation, or his dearest friend, to the maintenance of strict discipline! With all the causes of suspicion which he would insinuate Captain Sutton had given him, he continues him in command, and, when leading down to the enemy, suffers him to fall astern near three miles, without taking any intermediate notice of his conduct.

But, even if he had no such suspicions, what opinion shall we conceive of the Commander of a fleet, who, while drawing near the enemy, beaten and flying before him, should not once throw his eyes back to the state of his squadron, or discover two of his largest men of war, the chief of his strength indeed, to be dropping astern till they had got to the distance of nearly three miles? Such however the Governor proves to have been his own neglect, if we give credit to this part of his letter. The great and tempting prospect of destroying the enemy lay before him; he was eagerly stretching forward to seize it, but *happening* to throw his eyes back, he found the Monmouth and Isis three miles astern of him; a circumstance which, it seems, neither the Governor himself, nor any officer of his ship, ever saw, during the length of time it must have taken to have got so far a-head. Discovering it, however, he is compelled by it to put an end at once to his pursuit. He feels, indeed, the bitterest anguish; for if he pursued them till day-light, he had every success to promise to his country: But he thought it best to return to Port Praya, and to suffer the enemy to continue their voyage; and so ends the journal of his victory.

I shall now only observe, that as his instructions are secret, it is impossible to dispute the propriety of the reasons which he gives for this extraordinary determination. And yet it is but fair to ask, if other steps might not have been taken to prevent his charge from being left unprotected, or in ignorance where to find him? Could the enemy have had any other force in those seas, after the destruction of Monsieur Suffrein, from which his convoy could have had any danger to dread? Had the Governor no frigate or armed ship to spare, to conduct his squadron to a place of rendezvous? These are questions which, probably, will never be answered.

B L A K E.

I THINK Blake is in the right not to take any notice of Raleigh's letter. But lest those who are equally ignorant of sea matters with that *facetious* gentleman, should think his questions relative to a place of rendezvous unanswerable, because no answer has been given to them, I will beg leave to ask him if he forgets, or does not know, that the Island of Trinadad offered itself to Governor Johnstone, as a convenient and safe rendezvous for his convoy, *which he feared to leave in ignorance where to find him?* Does he not know, or has he never been told, that in sailing from St. Jago, it lays almost in the way, and that it has sometimes been made in holding that course, even by those who had no intentions of touching there? Has he never heard that this Island was recommended to the Governor, before he left Europe, as the best rendezvous he could originally appoint for his fleet, and infinitely preferable to the Island of St. Jago, as dividing his voyage more proportionately? Had not the Governor time enough to recall this advice to his memory during the anxious moments he passed, distracted between the painful and cruel alternative of renouncing the great and tempting prospects that presented themselves to him, if he should continue to pursue the enemy, or of leaving his convoy in distress, without any fixed determination concerning them, or their destination? Had the enemy, as Blake observes, any force in those seas, but that which the Governor was *certain to destroy?* Did it then require any depth of resources to recollect that the St. Carlos, with the other armed ships, must have answered every purpose of conducting the convoy to the appointed rendezvous? Raleigh has more of the *zeal* than of the *sense* of his nation; he would else cease to ask questions that lead to new matter of accusation against his countryman.

## From the LONDON GAZETTE,

St. James's, June 8, 1781.

*Extract of a letter from Commodore GEORGE JOHNSTONE  
to the Earl of HILLSBOROUGH, one of his Majesty's  
Principal Secretaries of State, dated Romney, in Port  
Praya Road, in the Island of St. Jago, April 30, 1781,  
brought by Capt. Lindsey, of the Porto sloop of war.*

MY LORD,

ON the 16th of April, at half past nine o'clock in the morning, being at anchor in Port Praya, in the Island of St. Jago, with the squadron of his Majesty's ships under my command, which are named in the margin,\* together with the East-India ships, transports, and victuallers, who sailed with us from England, the Isis (which ship lay the farthest to leeward) made the signal for seeing eleven sail in the Offing, towards the N. E.

I was then absent in a boat, giving directions for moving some ships which had driven too near each other.

As soon as I saw the signal for so many strange ships, I instantly returned on board the Romney, and made the signal for all persons to come from the shore, and to repair on board their respective ships, having at that time not less than 1500 persons absent from the fleet, who were employed in watering, fishing, and embarking live cattle, with other occupations necessary to the dispatch in refitting so many ships, besides a number of officers and troops who were taking the recreations of the shore.

As

\* Romney, 50; Hero, 74; Monmouth, 64; Jupiter, 50; Isis, 50; Terror bomb vessel; Infernal fire ship; Rattlesnake cutter.

As soon as this signal was made, and enforced by the repeated firing of guns, and after a boat had been dispatched to the shore, to give more expedition and effect to the embarkation, a signal was made to unmoor, and another to prepare for battle.

I went on board the Isis, to make my observations on the strange ships, as they could only be seen from that ship, on account of the east point of land which intervened.

From the Isis I plainly discovered five large ships of the line, and several smaller ships, standing in for the land; the large ships being separated from the convoy, and making signals by superior and inferior flags, which plainly denoted that they were French.

Upon this I returned on board the Romney, calling to the East-India ships, as I passed and repassed, to prepare for battle; for most of them were as yet heedless of the signals which had been made.

At a quarter before eleven o'clock the strange ships appeared, coming round the east point of land, drawn up in a line, and leading into the bay. His Majesty's ships of war (excepting as to the people who were absent on shore) were by this time prepared to receive the enemy, if they should offer any insult.

We plainly perceived they intended an attack by the springs which were passed to their cables along the outside of the ships; and we knew the small regard which the French usually pay to the laws of nations, when they are possessed of a superior force, or find it convenient to dispense with such obligations, and in this our expectations were not disappointed; for with much courage and seeming determination, the French Commodore led on within two cables length of the Monmouth, Jupiter, and Hero, passing the Diana, Terror bomb, and Infernal fire-ship, who lay without the rest of the ships; here he hoisted his broad pendant, and displayed the French colours; he then hauled up his courses, and fired two shot at the Isis from his larboard bow as he luffed up, and immediately after permitting his

his ship to shoot up in the wind, as far as the force with which the ship was sailing enabled her, he dropt his anchor a-breast of the Monmouth, and began to fire away among the ships as fast as he could discharge and load; his sails, however, were still flying about in great confusion, so that his spring on the cable did not hold when the ship was checked to bring up, and he drove a-breast of the Hero.

After the two guns mentioned above had been discharged with shot, the fire from his Majesty's ships opened upon the enemy with great power and effect.

The next French ship which followed their Commodore, anchored a-head of him; the third endeavoured to pass through for the Romney; but being unable to weather the different ships, he anchored a-stern of his Commodore, and continued there for a short space, driving about with his sails loose, until he boarded the Fortitude and Hinchinbrook East India ships, and then went to sea. The fourth ship run on different lines, luffing and bearing up as she passed among the skirt of our ships, and firing and receiving fire as he sailed along, but seemingly in great confusion also; and at last, with much difficulty, he wore clear of the reef on the West point without us.

The fifth ship run among the merchant vessels also, firing at all, and attempting to board two or three as he passed along, without success.

In a quarter of an hour after the first gun, several of our East India ships had recovered the alarm, and were firing at the enemy, and some of them in well directed lines; two or three however had struck their colours, and thrown the Company's packets overboard, and others prudently put to sea.

The Romney could fire only in two openings, and this under a precision which was cautiously observed; neither could she veer away cable to open a larger space, as the Jason lay right a-stern of her. Seeing the Romney was like to have little share in the action, after the fourth ship had passed her, I ordered the barge

barge to be manned to go on board the Hero. General Meadows and Captain Saltern insisted they should accompany me, with a degree of generosity and good humour which I could not resist. It is pleasant to be near the General at all times, but on the day of battle that satisfaction is felt in a peculiar degree. We were received by Captain Hawker with as cheerful and affable civility as if we had come to dinner, while the Hero kept up a constant, awful, heavy discharge of artillery.

The action bordered upon a surprize, and the nature of the service in which we were engaged rendered us liable to much confusion; yet upon the whole, until the enemy were beat off, I saw nothing on our part but steady, cool, determined valour.

Captain Alms, of the Monmouth, kept up a well directed fire.

Captain Pasley had worked hard from the beginning of the business, and had got a spring on his cable, by which effort every shot told from the Jupiter.

The French Commodore now found his situation too hot, and he cut his cable in three quarters of an hour, and went away through the ships, as his second astern had done before him; the other a-head was now left behind, an object to be fired at by all the ships in our fleet, who could get guns to bear upon him.—In this situation he remained for fifteen minutes, hardly firing a gun during the whole time: such a spectacle of distress I never before beheld.

I am satisfied myself he struck his colours, and that they were not merely shot away, as some allege; and this I believe, because different ships thought he struck at the same time; but it was impossible to get all the ships to cease firing at once; and one gun being afterwards discharged from the enemy's ship, the firing began again even from such of our ships as had left off.

Whether his cable was shot away, or he cut the cable, I cannot say, but off the ship went round upon the heel, her stern falling close to the broadside of the

Isis; her masts were tottering; her yards were hanging different ways; her sails were flying about in rags, and full of holes. First fell the mizen-mast, next went the main-mast, and lastly the fore-mast and outer end of the bowsprit tumbled in the water.

I instantly returned to the Romney, and made the signal for all captains, and after hearing the condition of every ship, I directed the men of war to cut and slip as fast as they could get to sea, to follow up the victory, with orders to make any India ships who lay in their way, to cut their cables also, that they might not be impeded.

I ordered the merchant ships to lie fast and repair their damages, until we joined them again.

As soon as the Jason was out of the way, the Romney was cast by a spring on the cable, and she went out to sea under the acclamations of the whole fleet.

The Jupiter instantly followed, and we run between our scattered ships and the enemy. Perceiving neither the Isis nor Diana making any signal to follow, though both of them lay in clear births for so doing, their several signals were made. The Diana answered, and soon after followed; but although gun after gun was fired, to enforce the signal, to call out the Isis, she still remained without any signs of obedience to my signal then abroad. At last the Hero came under our stern, with a message from Captain Sutton, saying that his masts and yards, and sails and rigging, were so wounded, that he could not come out without repairing them, but that he would follow as fast as he could.

My answer was, all this is no excuse for disobeying my positive orders; besides, I think his damages immaterial to a man of any resources.

Captain Sutton's signal was therefore again enforced by another gun; he then hoisted his answering flag, and came out, after three hours delay.

All the ships being now come out, the signal was made to form the line a-head on the larboard tack.

The

The French ships had before this collected and taken the disabled ship in tow, and they had raised a stump forward, and fixed a sail upon it, with which they had wore the hulk, and put before the wind in a line of battle a-breast, and sent off their convoy under all the sail they could set.

When the Isis joined us she run under our stern, and repeated an account of her distress and her damages, particularly the want of a mizzen top-sail-yard, which I told the captain was nothing at all.

The signal was now made to bear up in a line of battle a-breast. At that instant the Isis lost her fore-top-mast above the topsail-yard, which yard was not injured by the fall, nor was the sail hurt, or any other damage sustained, to prevent the ship from working, the fore-top-sail being close reefed and set.

I immediately shortened sail to give time to the Isis to clear the wreck, which was done in half an hour or forty minutes.

This increased our distance from the enemy. As soon as I saw the Isis could make sail, I bore up and set the fore-sail, and made the signal for the line a-breast. When we came near the enemy, I found the Isis and Monmouth had dropt a-stern between two and three miles, though both of them sail much better than the Romney: their signals were therefore made to call them to their stations; the Monmouth immediately answered, and made sail accordingly, but the Isis still kept behind.

By these various obstructions and delays, added to a strong lee current, the enemy had drawn us far to leeward of St. Jago. The sun was set; the sea had increased; I could not propose a decisive action in the night. If I followed until day-light, my prospects were great and tempting; but I must then determine to leave my convoy in distress, and separate from the troops, without any fixed determination concerning them or their destination; and I must also have relinquished the object of the present expedition; because,

after getting so far to leeward that we could not fetch the islands of Bravo or Fogo, it is a well-known fact that no ship can bear up against the N. E. winds and the S. W. currents which always prevail here, much less after such an action as must be expected.

On the other hand, if the principal force of the enemy should arrive before us at the place of our destination, it might prove equally fatal to the object of the expedition.

The dilemma was great indeed, and I felt the cruel situation with an anguish which I never before experienced; but after maturely weighing the subject in all its consequences with those persons on whose judgment I have most confidence, I thought myself bound to return to join the ships under my protection, and to pursue the object of the expedition, it being most probable that the enemy must either send off two of their disabled ships of war to the West Indies, in which case I shall have a superior naval force, or they must touch at the Brazils for water and repairs; and perhaps they will be obliged to do both; in either of which cases we shall have a great advantage by the preceding action.

Next day we re-took the Hinchinbrook East India ship, with twenty-five Frenchmen on board; and I learn from them that the squadron who attacked us was composed of

Le Heros, 74, Mons. De Suffrein, Brigadier des Armes, Grand Commander de Malte.

L'Annibal, 74, M. de Tremigon, Capitaine de Vaisseau.

L'Artesien, 64, M. de Cardaillac, Chevalier de Malthe.

Le Sphynx, 64, M. de Duchillon, Capitaine de Vaisseau.

Le Vengeur, 64, M. le Chevalier de Forbin, Capitaine de Vaisseau.

La Fortune, Corvette.

M. de Castrries, Commandant de l'Armee de Terre: Regiment

Regiment de Pondicherry, deux Batilons.

Detachment du regiment d'Austrasie.

4 Vaisseux des Indes, viz.

- |                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Le Briton,        | } et cinq Vaisseaux de transport |
| 2. Le Trois Amis,    | } armée en Flute; all doubled    |
| 3. L'Isle de France, | } with copper.                   |
| 4. Pondicherry,      |                                  |

The Hannibal was the ship which was dismasted; the Hero led in, and suffered damages next in proportion to the Hannibal; the Artesien, Sphynx, and Vengeur came in according as they are named, but the last three did not receive much injury. The Captain of the Artesien, to which ship the prisoners belong, was killed by a grape shot on the shoulder.

They informed me that they sailed from Brest the 22d of March, with Mons. le Grasse, and twenty sail of the line, three of which are of three decks, bound to Martinique, besides the Sagittaire frigate of 50 guns, bound to North America.

That they separated off Madeira, and their purpose was to attack the squadron under my command, wherever they could find it, of which they had received a correct list at Brest: that the Artesien first discovered us lying in the Road, and tacked towards Monsieur Suffrein to acquaint him of it; that he instantly ordered them to prepare for the attack; and being asked by Monsieur Cardaillac, the Captain of the Artesien, what they should do, if the Portuguese Forts should fire upon them? He desired them to fire at the Portuguese Forts also.

After an action of such a length, in such a situation, in smooth water, with large ships so near each other, it is surprising to find how few men have been killed, and what slight damage his Majesty's ships have received.

The Monmouth lying within a cable's length, had not a man killed, and only six wounded.

The Jupiter had two wounded.

The Isis had four killed, and five wounded.

The Romney had seven wounded; and the other ships according to the list enclosed.

The Jason and Latham East India ships, who lay at the furthest distance from the enemy, had 4 killed and 14 wounded; among the number of the killed is Lieutenant Keith, of the Jason, a brave and worthy officer.

Several of the East India ships have suffered in their masts, yards, and rigging, but nothing that will impede the voyage, or which cannot be repaired even here with security.

The fate of the Infernal fire-ship, and Terror bomb deserves to be particularly related: they had come from the Isle of May two days before, and lay to the eastward, without all the ships, notwithstanding my orders in writing had been strictly given, and punctually communicated, for all the small ships to anchor within the rest. The Terror had sprung her bowsprit, and was fishing of it, with her rigging loose, when the enemy appeared, and one of the sixty-four gun ships layed her on board.

The Terror catched fire, and the enemy durst not take possession of her, though often invited so to do by Captain Wood. She then cut her cable, and drove to sea, where she lost her bowsprit and fore-mast.

One of the French ships again followed her in this miserable condition, and fired several shot at the Terror; yet Captain Wood seeing us preparing to come out, wwould not strike his colours, but bravely contrived to set some stay-sails, and slide off in that shattered condition.

The fire-ship went to sea, and was taken by the enemy, by what means I cannot relate; but I have good reason to believe she was afterwards either abandoned by the enemy, or re-taken by the crew, as the Jupiter saw her next day to leeward, and standing towards us, with her distinguishing vanes and answering flag on board.

The

The Fortitude India ship behaved with uncommon bravery. She was boarded by the Artesien, who fired many guns into her; several of the enemy's crew jumped on board the Fortitude; yet, in this situation, Captain Jenkinson, of the 98th regiment, kept up a constant fire with small arms; several of the enemy were shot on the shrouds, and two were forced overboard, and taken up again into the Fortitude, after the two ships had separated.

The Hinchinbrook was also miserably cut and mangled by the Artesien, before she was taken.

Many of the other India ships suffered considerable damages, particularly the Lord North, Osterly, and Asia; and the Edward victualler was nearly sunk and carried out to sea, though afterwards abandoned.

With great difficulty, after turning many days, we recovered this bay with the Fortitude, and we towed in the Hinchinbrook and Edward.

Every possible exertion has been used since to repair the various damages which the ships had sustained, and the whole convoy as completely fitted as circumstances will allow; in the execution of which service I am chiefly indebted to the indefatigable attention of Capt. Pasley, whose zeal in this, and every other occasion, I wish may be represented to his Majesty.

To add to our embarrassments, the Porto sloop, who joined us that day we got back, ran foul of the Hero, and lost her fore-mast and bowsprit.

I have judged it proper to put Capt. Sutton, of the Isis, under an arrest.

Since writing the above account, the Infernal fire-ship has joined us. The enemy had abandoned her on our approach, having taken away Captain Darby and five seamen, and nine soldiers of the 98th regiment.

Lieutenant Hamilton has been ever since turning up to gain this port, which shews the impossibility of joining the convoy, if I had followed the enemy.

The

( 38 )

The fireship has sustained little or no damages.  
We shall sail from this Island to-morrow; and the  
Porto sloop will be ready to proceed for England the  
day after with these dispatches.

I am, with the greatest respect, my Lord, your  
Lordship's most obedient, and most humble  
servant,

GEO. JOHNSTONE.

F I N I S.

2 JY 61

